



City of Bristol, Connecticut, USA

Department of Bristol Youth Services
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March 2, 2015

Appropriations Secondary Education Sub-committee

Connecticut Legislative Office Building
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Regarding: **Testimony for March 3, 2015 at 5:00 p.m.**

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Secondary Education Sub-committee:

My name is Eileen McNulty. I am a resident of Bristol and employed by the City of Bristol as the Director of Youth & Community Services. I relocated to Connecticut twenty-five (25) years ago, drawn to be a part of the remarkable work being performed through the Connecticut Youth Services Association supported by the State and the local communities. Today, I am writing to you to express my concerns about the proposed funding cuts to the Connecticut Youth Service Bureaus and the proposal to relocate the management of the bureaus.

Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs) have the unique role of centrally coordinating services in local communities as it function under state statute. The Bureaus strive to enhance the networking and support between family, school, peer and community environments to strengthen the healthy functioning of families and provide opportunities for all youth to function as responsible members of the community. Administratively, this is accomplished through assessing the on-going needs of youth, the gaps and disconnections in the service delivery systems, and advocating for and enhancing resources. Youth Service Bureaus work with many local and state partners to address "big picture" issues such as: preventing substance abuse, creating a positive climate to prevent bullying and peer violence, and striving to end homelessness.

Youth Service Bureaus also ensure that there are prevention programs available to all youth and intervention services for young people who are facing factors placing them at high risk. YSB programs assist youth in the development of their desires, skills, talents, and goals, and view children as valued and contributing members of the community. Programs and services span several arenas including *positive youth development, juvenile justice diversion, behavioral and mental health, employment training programs and child welfare*. *Positive Youth Development* programs are designed to build skills and competencies of young people, nurture the pursuit of their goals and aspirations, and strengthen family, peer, school and community connections. Group programs develop skills such as budgeting or assertive communication and have an experiential component such as apartment hunting or outdoor survival. Participants

learn about poignant teen issues, such as anti-bullying and human development, and sponsor a community service project. *Juvenile Justice Services* and programs divert youth from becoming involved with the juvenile court system and aim to restore the balance of justice to the victim and school or community. *Behavioral and mental health* services respond to young people who are experiencing emotional distress related to complicated life stressors including significant losses or an addiction illness of a loved-one. Programs educate and support participants to aid in their development of resiliency skills and make positive social and emotional connections. *Employment training programs* provide youth with the experience that they need to be competitive in the workplace, cultivate their career goals and reinforce the importance of completing their secondary education. *Child Welfare* services assist and empower families to meet basic needs and maintain a supportive family environment. Services aim to reduce barriers such as financial hardship or lack of transportation.

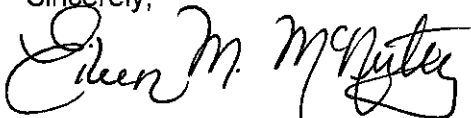
YSBs can offer center-based and outreach activities to schools and neighborhoods to cultivate young people's sense of responsibility, self-worth and encourage community service. In Bristol for example, during the day, staff can be seen supporting students and delivering programs in the schools or participating in team meetings to benefit students. In the afternoon, staff facilitate afterschool and employment programs or counsel youth. In the evening, the bureau hosts a wide range of positive youth development training programs. Family therapy also is available for families who are underinsured or cannot afford co-pays for clinical service and would be at high risk without intervention services. On the weekends, you may see youth, police and youth service staff working on a community service project, patrolling on bicycles, or training in first responders search and rescue drills. Staff also take the lead role in facilitating Juvenile Review Board activities to divert children from the court system or family-focused interdisciplinary team meeting to assist families with accessing mental health, educational and community resources. In addition, Bristol Youth Services networks with the community, religious organizations, foundations, police and government agencies to help low income families meet basic needs.

As a whole, Connecticut Youth Service Bureaus are working in 145 communities reaching over 448,000 youth and parents in a two year cycle, a bargain at \$3.6 million dollars or less than \$17 per participant. The state funding to Youth Services Bureaus is more than 50% matched by local funds and in many bureaus, is used to leverage additional funding to meet the needs of our youth and families.

CYSA has forged a collaborative and stable partnership with the State Department of Education. Together, we have implemented Results Based Accountability to our work with students. The State Department of Education is experienced with managing services and accounting with individual local communities. Local YSBs are complementary to local education agencies and an integral part of the infrastructure of the local communities. As a tax payer, I am concerned with the cost of moving the management functions on the state level. As a professional, I am concerned about the potential destabilizing trickle down effects on the youth and their families.

I thank you for your consideration to support the Youth Services Bureaus under the **State Department of Education.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Eileen M. McNulty".

Eileen M. McNulty, MSW
Director of Youth & Community Services